

Voices without Votes

The Role of Women in De Valera's East Clare Election Win

By

Rang 3 - Mr. Spring's, Bunscoil na mBráithre, Inis,
Co. an Chláir



The Countess by Chloe.

Introduction

Eamon de Valera was elected as a Member of Parliament for County Clare for the Westminster Parliament in London in July 1917. At the time de Valera was elected in Ennis, many women did not have the right to vote. Some women were involved in a campaign to get the right to vote and they were known as the suffragettes. Other women were involved in revolutionary organisations such as Cumann na mBan or organisations fighting for the rights of working women. Women in Ireland had to wait until 1918 to get the right to vote in elections. Even then it was only women aged over 30 who were allowed to vote. Despite the fact that women did not have the right to vote in 1917, they made their voices heard.

Suffragettes

The suffragettes were a society that fought for women's rights. It was started in England in 1903 by Emmeline Pankhurst. Many men in important positions at the time believed that women should not have the right to vote. In fact, many of them were in organizations to fight against the suffragette movement. One important person against the suffragettes in Ireland was the Lord Lieutenant of Ireland, Lord Wimborne. He was the leading British politician in Ireland at the time of the 1916 rising. He stopped Sixmilebridge woman Georgina Frost from taking up a job as a Petty Sessions Clerk because she was a woman. A lot of politicians in Clare supported her.

The Campaign Trail

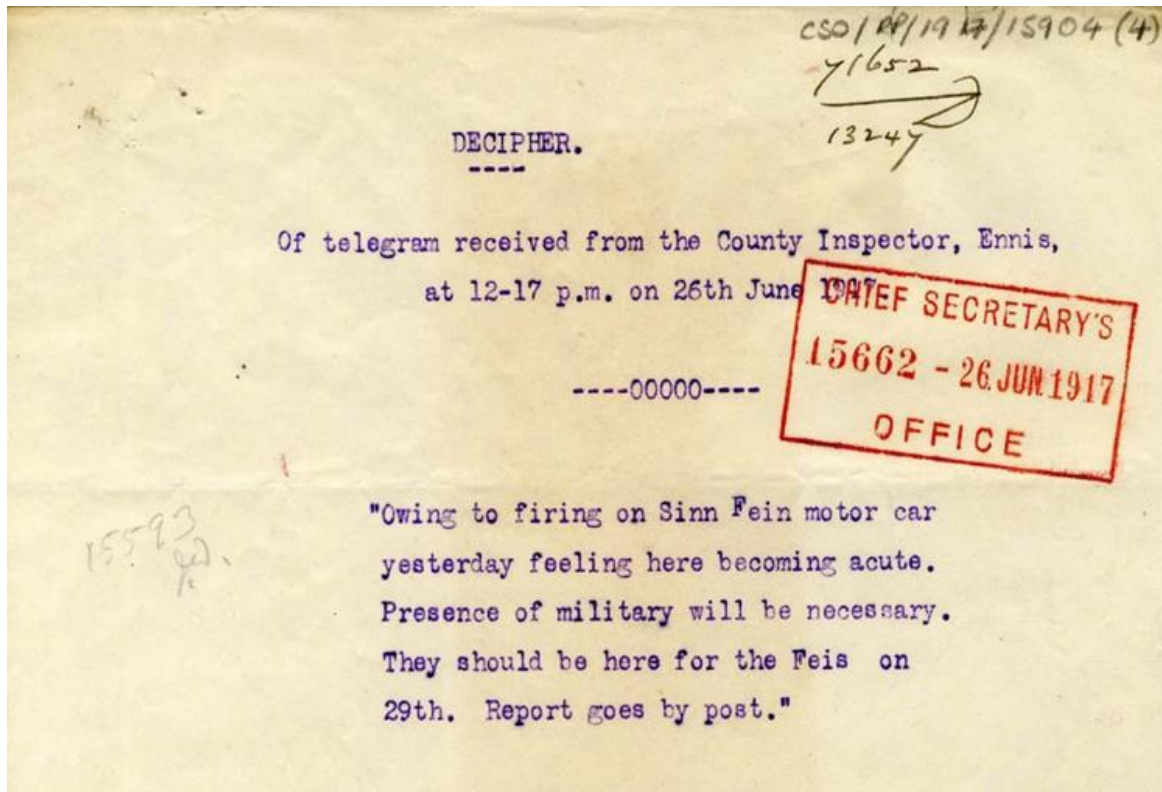
Kevin O'Sheil who was one of those who campaigned for De Valera in Ennis describes what it was like when he arrived in Ennis by train:

“At Ennis I put up at the famous Old Ground Hotel which I discovered as a Dev. stronghold. There I met for the first time that famous man himself and many other notables in the new movement, including Countess Markievicz, Darrell Figgis and Harry Boland; and, of course, Joe McGrath and Dan McCarthy. The hotel was packed to its fullest capacity - indeed beyond it, for they were sleeping two's three's and four's in the bedrooms, many on bedroom floors and on the chairs and sofas in the lounges. There was, of course, much discomfort under such conditions; but nothing could damp down the atmosphere of enthusiasm that prevailed, everybody seeming to be animated by a terrific and wholly altruistic purpose”.



This photo shows Countess Markievicz in light coloured jacket behind the pipers and Eamon de Valera a few rows back wearing his Volunteer Uniform. They are marching through Ennis Town. The group includes many women.

But life was not often easy on the outside of the Hotel. Those who supported Patrick Lynch and the Irish Party were not happy with the arrival of De Valera and his supporters. At one stage his car was fired upon as it travelled through Clare. Even the police were worried as this telegram shows:



The Irish Party had organised some speeches in Ennis to support Patrick Lynch. Countess Markievicz left the Hotel to see what was going on. She couldn't help herself when she heard the speeches and started arguing back from the back of the crowd. The crowd became very angry. Kevin O'Sheil describes what happened next:

"First they shook their fists in our faces, then they began shoving us about and some of them had the heartlessness to visit their wrath on the Countess's poor dog, sending him off, howling with pain from their kicks, his tail between his legs. When she scolded them for their cowardly action, they pulled off her green felt hat, at the same time delivering a few punches on us men. The loss of her hat agitated the

Countess as much as the ill-treatment of her dog. "Oh, men!" she cried, "Do give me back my old hat! That's the old hat I wore in the fight at Easter Week. And it's the old hat that went to gaol with me. Do give it back to me!" Not exactly the sort of appeal that would pay dividends in that company!

Eventually a strong detachment of armed B.I.C. men came along and ringed us in from the furious mob, now highly incensed and shouting for our blood. The R.I.C. were under the command of a young District Inspector. He was most courteous, particularly to Madame; but she wouldn't answer or speak to him at all, even when he retrieved her hat and returned it to her.



She resented their presence, and more so, their protection, a resentment which, I can truly say, I certainly did not share! The police faced our antagonists with drawn batons and, bit by bit, drew us back within their defensive lines to a cul de sac lane at the end of which was a convent. In that position, it was much easier to protect us as the constables, drawn across the lane's narrow entry, sealed it off from our pursuers. We were then quite a while behind the lines of our guardians, listening in safety, to the raging mob that they were holding back.

Eventually we were brought back to our hotel through the convent grounds under police escort, much to Madame's disgust which was riot lessened by my thanking the young D.I."



The photo was taken around the same time in O'Connell Square in Ennis. The young girl in white seems to be afraid that her Grandad will get injured or arrested.

Frances and Oonagh O'Connor of the Old Ground Hotel

The Old Ground Hotel was at the centre of the events in Ennis. Frances O'Connor joined Cumann na mBan early in 1917, when she was the owner of the Old Ground Hotel in Ennis. Cumann na mBan was a women's society working for Irish Independence. Her hotel was used by the Irish Volunteers. She helped with the catering, intelligence, propaganda and keeping all telegrams and mail safe. She was assisted by her daughter Oonagh who was also a member of Cumann na mBan. The hotel, which was constantly being used by Sinn Fein and the Irish Volunteers, would eventually be burnt out by British Forces in 1921.



The Old Ground Hotel, Ennis (O'Connell Street is behind it).

Like the O'Connor's, other sacrifices were made too by the wives and daughters of men involved in political parties such as Sinn Féin at the time. On June 30th 1917 Laurence Ginnell wrote to his wife from the Old Ground Hotel, Ennis: "De Valera and myself addressed four meetings in the country before the Ennis one. A great houseful of us here these days - 60 at breakfast, all like brothers. Make a big effort to sell house, even at a sacrifice. We are taking a plunge involving financial risk, but God is good".

Josephine Barrett

Josephine, a niece of Frances O'Connor, joined the Ennis branch of Cumann na mBan in April 1917. At the time she was a student but she was asked to organise Cumann na mBan and help with the Clare Election. Josephine came from a large family who were heavily involved in the Mid Clare Brigade during the War of Independence. She looked after Countess Markievicz in Clare. We saw the registration form that the countess signed when we visited the Clare County Museum. On the space for occupation she wrote: Irish Rebel.

A.R.-E. REGISTRATION FORM.
(For use in Hotels, Inns, Lodging-houses, etc.)
THE OLD GROUND HOTEL, ENNIS.
TO BE FILLED IN IMMEDIATELY ON ARRIVAL.

1. Surname	Markievicz	2. Christian Name	Countess
3. Nationality	Irish	4. Birthplace	Irish
5. Year of Birth		6. Sex (M. or F.)	
7. Permission to Allege (a) Residence			

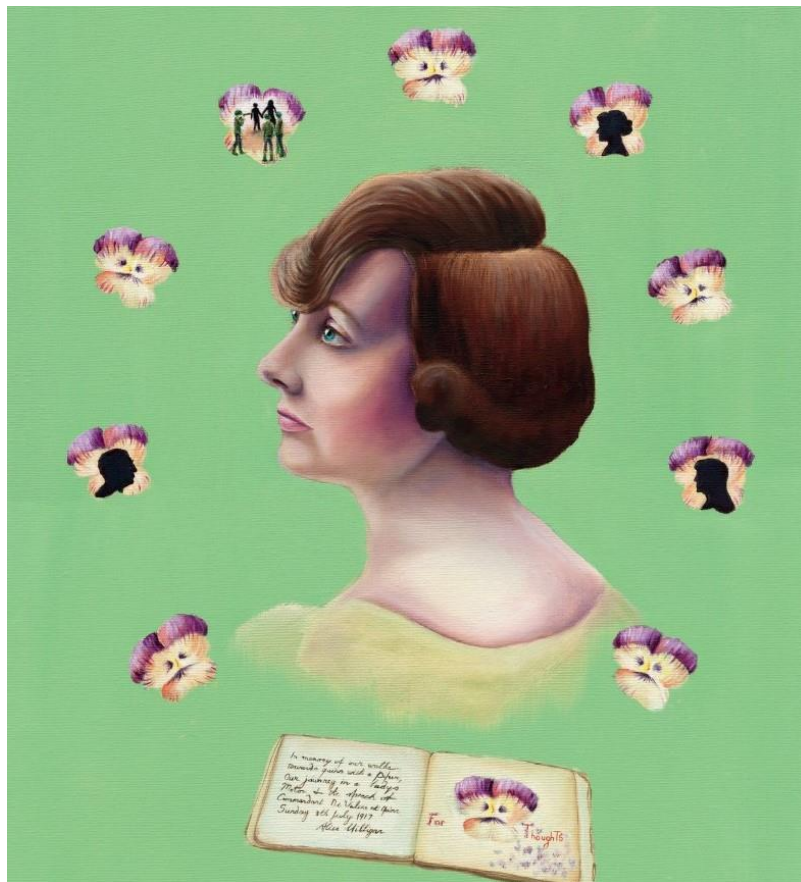
Netta O'Brien Sheedy

Netta O'Brien was a friend of Canon O'Kennedy of St. Flannan's College who was involved in the Ennis Sinn Féin Club and the election campaign. Along with her sister Kitty, she was a member of the Ennis Branch of Cumann na mBan. Like many women of the time she collected the signatures of some of De Valera's famous campaign team. Her autograph book was found in the drawer of an old table. In 2016, the book was presented to Clarecastle & Ballyea Heritage & Wildlifre Group.



Kitty and Netta O'Brien of Carnelly House, Clarecastle County Clare.

Kathleen Griffin



A portrait of Kathleen Griffin by Marie Connole.

Kathleen Griffin from Francis Street in Ennis collected autographs too. She might have worked in the election office in 1917. She too kept an autograph book with the names of many important people who came to Ennis to support Eamon de Valera. During the election campaign of 1917 Alice Milligan walked in the company of other people to Quin behind the pipers as part of the campaign. Writing in Kathleen Griffin's autograph book, Alice Milligan amusingly writes that she forgot her coat following her trip from Dublin to Ennis. She also writes that she did not expect such heavy rain in the month of July! Jenny Wyse Power's initials also appear in the book. The Proclamation of the Republic was signed in her House. Michael Collins signature is there but somebody tore out Eamon de Valera's as a keepsake.

Cumann na mBan

The Ennis branch of Cumann na mBan were very busy during the election campaign. They presented Eamon de Valera with this Illuminated Address. It is stored in the Clare Museum. Among those who signed it are Mrs. Roughan of Stamerpark (President), Mary Barrett and Delia Begley.

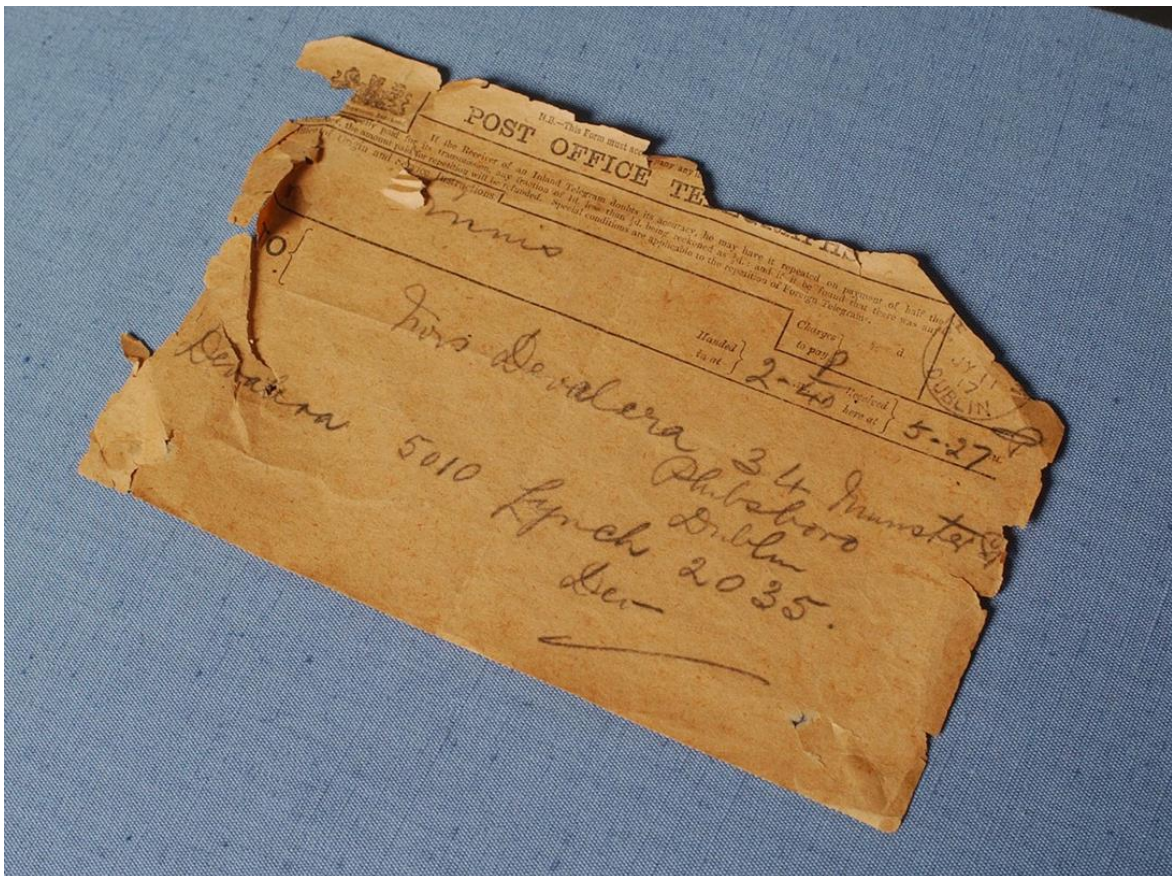


Cumann na mBan sang "A Soldier's Song" during the election in Ennis. It can be seen in this photo at the O'Connell Monument, Ennis. The lines of the National Anthem are written in English. The song was first composed by Peter Carney about 1910. The first commercial recording of A Soldiers Song was made in New York in early 1917. There's still some printed sheets of A Soldier's Song printed by Nono printers Ennis around.



Victorious

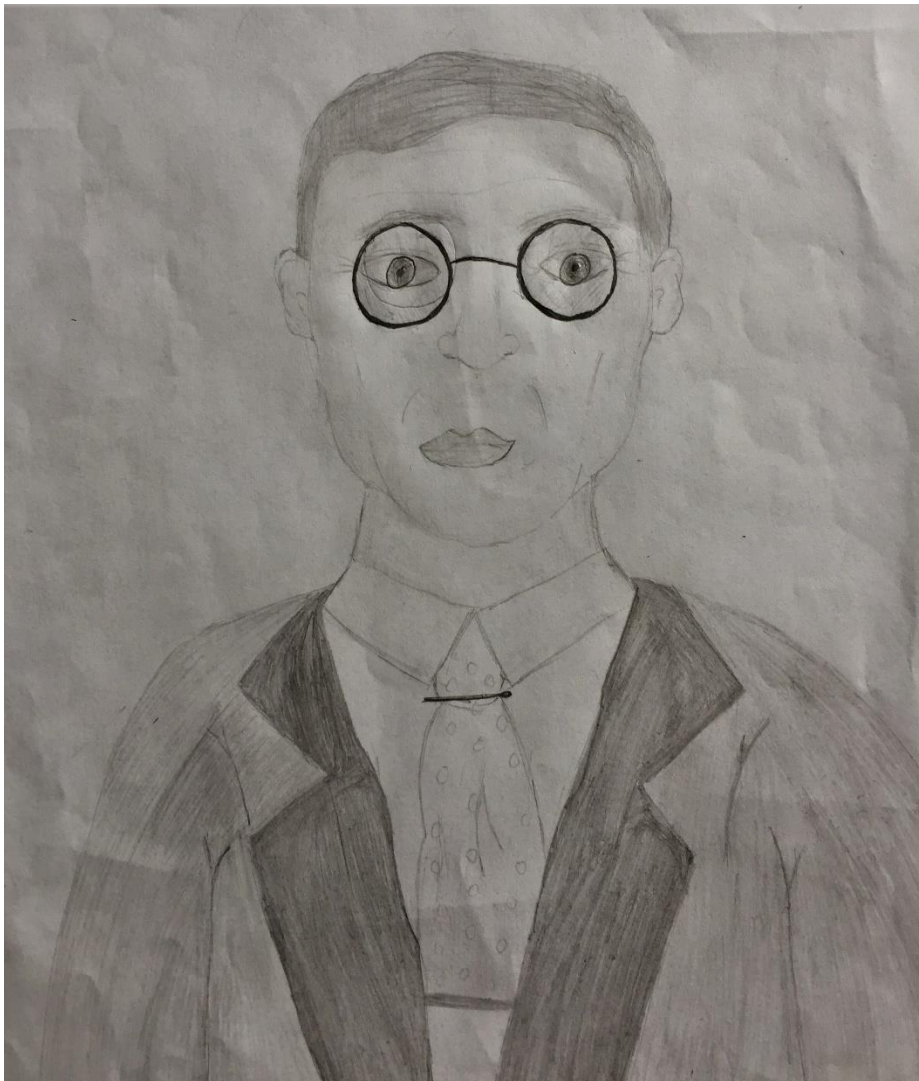
“The day after the election we drove from the Old Ground Hotel, Mick Collins, de Valera and Corrigan, who later became State Solicitor, he was our solicitor then. I was on the running board of the car. There was a film of this shown in the Rotunda picture-house afterwards. I took a.....packet from my pocket and wrote on the inside that do Valera got so many votes and Lynch got so many, and threw the packet out the window. Lynch told me I should not have done that. Some man dropped off the wall outside and got the paper, and when we heard the cheer outside we knew the crowd had the news. I got a present of a Claddagh ring from the people of Ennis”. - Thomas Pugh.



A telegram sent by Eamon de Valera to his wife Sinéad with the election result. De Valera 5010 and Lynch 2035. We saw it in the Clare County Museum.

Conclusion

We hope you enjoyed our project. We enjoyed making it and visiting all of the places and statues around our town. We saw lots of interesting things in the Museum. We have lots more stories about suffragettes and Michael Collins. Eamon de Valera won in Clare but that was not the last time he came to Ennis. But that's another story!



Eamon de Valera by Emily.

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Thanks also to John Rattigan (below) of the Clare County Museum, Arthur's Row, Ennis, who gave us a talk and tour of the Museum.



Appendices



Ennis Courthouse Model by Conor.





Type of Whistle used by the Police in Ennis in 1917.



Type of Buttons on De Valera's Green Tunic.



Our Model of the Scene at the O'Connell Monument.



The Rest is History!